




LEGAL FOOD HUB
A project of Conservation Law Foundation



LEGAL FOOD HUB 2024 YEAR IN REVIEW





By providing free legal assistance and education to New England's farmers and local food businesses, we support a sustainable, resilient, and just regional food system.

The Problem

Running a farm or food business is tough, and industry-specific legal assistance can be expensive and difficult to find. Businesses often must choose between remaining exposed to unknown legal risks and paying more for legal help than they can afford.

Our Solution

The Legal Food Hub connects eligible New England farmers, food entrepreneurs, and the organizations that support them with free legal assistance and education. Expert volunteer attorneys in our network provide high-quality legal services and create accessible legal guides and webinars for our participants.

OUR YEAR IN REVIEW

Over the last four years, the Legal Food Hub has witnessed our region's farm and food businesses navigate inflation, political tumult, and increasingly extreme weather. Despite these challenges, New England's farmers and food entrepreneurs have continued to nourish and bring together our communities. Meanwhile, the region's food and farm nonprofits have built and strengthened programs that help these businesses succeed amidst this uncertainty. As we face upheaval of the federal policies and funding that help sustain these businesses and organizations, reliable and accessible legal services remain essential.

In our 11th year of operation, the Legal Food Hub provided free legal assistance to 118 farmers, food entrepreneurs, and food/farm organizations across New England. During our 2024 Winter Webinar Series, more than 150 people learned about forming cooperatives, protecting their business' brand, and more. And, for the first time, the Legal Food Hub provided live captioning at all four webinars, as part of our efforts to increase the accessibility of our legal resources.

Over 600 attorneys at more than 150 law firms around New England have provided high-quality, industry-tailored legal assistance through the Legal Food Hub since 2014. We are increasing the resources and support we provide to our pro bono attorney network through new initiatives to grow their knowledge and connectivity to one another. In 2024, we launched a listserv open to all Legal Food Hub attorneys. Our Attorney Council helped us position attorneys for success by providing critical guidance on managing and assigning pro bono cases. And in 2025, we are looking forward to offering a series of Continuing Legal Education courses to our attorneys.

As farm and food business owners grapple with the impacts of extreme flooding, shifting growing seasons, more frequent droughts, and the rising costs of running their businesses, a lawyer's assistance can make all the difference. The Legal Food Hub is here to help ensure that these businesses have the legal foundation and resilience they need to thrive.

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2024 HIGHLIGHTS

602

Thousand dollars saved on legal fees

118

Cases placed

162

Webinar attendees

141

Law firms in our network

Pumpkin Vine Family Farm

Participant Story



Anil Roopchand and Kelly Payson-Roopchand founded Pumpkin Vine Family Farm in Somerville, Maine, in 2008. Together, they are keeping six-generation farmland in production and building a beloved resource for their community. Kelly and Anil met in Trinidad, where they discovered their shared love of farming.

“Pumpkin Vine Family” is a Trinidadian expression that refers to the connections that bind people together. The farm produces milk, cheese, smoothies, and more from their purebred goats. In addition to selling their products at farmers markets, they also sell milk directly to two other award-winning creameries.

In 2017, Pumpkin Vine Family Farm was planning to hire their first employees. They contacted the Legal Food Hub for help reviewing their personnel policy and employment application, to ensure that they were in compliance with employment-related requirements.

The Legal Food Hub connected Kelly and Anil with Rudman Winchell’s Anne-Marie Storey, who specializes in employment and human resources law. Thanks to Anne-Marie’s extensive experience in small business hiring and labor issues, Kelly and Anil were able to hire their first part-time milker.

“The Legal Food Hub’s help getting us ready to hire employees was game-changing. Our products were in demand, but we wouldn’t have been able to expand without help,” says Kelly. Today, the farm has seven part-time employees.

Since 2017, Kelly and Anil have focused on developing “a healthy, strong, and productive goat herd,” which now includes goats who rank in the top 5% of the nation for milk production. They’ve also grown a community around the farm by hosting monthly community educational events and farmers markets. Pumpkin Vine Family Farm is also putting the finishing touches on construction of a new milking parlor, which features raised stands for 12 goats at a comfortable height for the milkers. The parlor will increase the farm’s efficiency and decrease their labor costs.

“It is difficult to get started as a small farmer, when the hours are so long, and the necessary infrastructure is so costly,” says Kelly. “We are tremendously grateful to all the organizations that support startup farms in Maine, as we could not have done it without you. We still work really hard, but we love what we do and feel lucky to have been able to realize our dream.”

SweetLi Baked

Participant Story



Alicia Albernaz has been baking her whole life. After earning degrees in Baking & Pastry Arts and Food Service Entrepreneurship at Johnson & Wales University, she spent a decade working for a range of food, beverage, and hospitality businesses of all sizes. When a few friends asked her to make their wedding cake in 2021, Alicia decided it was finally time to launch her own baking business in Auburn, Massachusetts: SweetLi Baked.

Initially a custom-decorated cookie and cake business, SweetLi Baked has shifted to producing and selling seasonal varieties of gourmet drop cookies, soft-baked sugar cookies, “brookies,” cookie bark, and paint-your-own cookie activities. SweetLi Baked received its wholesale license in late 2023, and Alicia has since been working on growing her custom retail and wholesale orders.

In 2024, Alicia came to the Legal Food Hub because she wanted to ensure that her wholesale and custom order contracts were well-positioned to protect her business. The Hub matched Alicia with

attorney Thomas Bockhorst for assistance with reshaping her contracts. “Tom was amazing! I cannot say enough great things about the process of working with Tom to overhaul my contracts and really make them work for my business where it is currently and for its growth in the future,” says Alicia.

Additionally, Alicia wanted to apply for several certifications of her business as woman-owned, including Women’s Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and Women-Owned Small Business. However, the applications for these programs required her to have an operating agreement for her LLC.

The Hub matched Alicia with attorneys Esteban Munera and Michael Jones of Goodwin Procter, who helped Alicia craft her operating agreement. With these certifications secured, SweetLi Baked can now sell to larger companies and government contracts. Alicia can also participate in special advancement and education opportunities, such as WBENC’s WeTHRIVE program.

“As an entrepreneur, especially in a food business, there are so many considerations and requirements to try and work through. It can be really daunting. The Legal Food Hub has really removed so many barriers [to legal assistance] that financially would have been something we could not do as a start-up/small business for many years,” says Alicia.

Up next, Alicia is working on a packaged cookie line to launch soon at retailers in Massachusetts. She also hopes to move into a commercial space, which would allow her to grow production and expand her wholesale license beyond state lines. “The Legal Food Hub is an amazing program. I am so thankful to the Center for Women and Enterprise for connecting us with this program. I have recommended it to every local food business I know that might qualify.”

Old Crow Ranch

Participant Story



At Old Crow Ranch in Durham, Maine, farmers Steve and Seren Sinisi raise hogs, cattle, and chickens using rotational pasturing to allow fresh grass and forage for the animals. They are committed to sustainability throughout their operation, including by building soil health on the farm and placing an agricultural easement on the property, which ensures that the land will remain in agricultural production for generations to come.

In 2019, Old Crow Ranch used the Legal Food Hub to close a deal to purchase a piece of a property. Old Crow Ranch had been leasing a field down the

road for 10 years, and the landowner wanted to sell it to Old Crow. Steve worked with the landowner and the Royal River Conservation Trust to purchase the land and put an agricultural easement on it. He reached out to the Legal Food Hub for help negotiating the transaction. Attorney Ryan Almy of Bernstein Shur worked with him to successfully navigate the deal, allowing Old Crow Ranch to grow and, at the same time, preserve 12 acres of Durham farmland for future generations. Now in 2024, the Sinisis hold space in their community as a hub for food and connection. One of their proudest accomplishments has been their on-site farm store that is open all year round and four days a week. They managed to purchase large walk-in freezers so they could easily sell their meat to the local community. They also sell some of their vegetables, as well as lamb, chicken, and turkeys from other farmers.

When asked what keeps them farming, Seren says, “We get to be here, we get to have kids who can run feral on the farm. We feel gratitude around being able to feed our community and live this self-directed life – we count ourselves as lucky even though we are very, very tired.”

They are now looking ahead and beginning to take steps for succession planning. The Legal Food Hub hopes to be a resource for them every step of the way.

“I can’t say enough about this service. There was no way we could have paid for the services of our lawyer.”

– Steve Sinisi, Old Crow Ranch

ATTORNEY DISTINGUISHED SERVICE AWARDS

Lori Yarvis

Archstone Legal Group

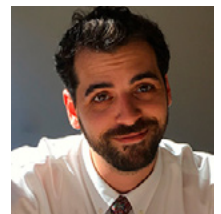


Attorney Lori Yarvis has volunteered with the Legal Food Hub since we started in 2014. A corporate lawyer, she has provided pro bono legal assistance in the form of entity formations, fiscal sponsorship contracts, succession questions, and lease agreements. Lori also provides support to the Hub through our Attorney Council. In the legal world, she has been named to the Best Lawyers in America list in Health Care Law as well as the Super Lawyers list for Business & Corporate Law. One Legal Food Hub participant said, "Lori has been SO helpful, and I hope that if I am given this opportunity again, that I will have her on my side."

We are so grateful to have Lori in our network!

Alec Slater

Weiner and Slater PLLC



Attorney Alec Slater has volunteered in Vermont since the Hub's Vermont branch launched in 2020. Alec has supported many food and farm businesses and nonprofits in the state. His legal expertise is in business, real estate, bankruptcy, and contract law. Not only does he volunteer with the Legal Food Hub, but he also provides pro bono legal services through Vermont Legal Aid and the Vermont Huts Association. One Legal Food Hub participant said: "Alec was a thoughtful and supportive attorney. He helped us finally create and implement an operating agreement which aligns with our vision for our operation. We're so fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with such a kind and knowledgeable person!"

Thank you, Alec, for your time and expertise!

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And Thank YOU!

Thank you to the individual donors and foundations who enable us to grow and coordinate essential legal services for New England's farm and food businesses. If you would like to support the Legal Food Hub's work, please visit <https://legalfoodhub.org/donate>.

OUR ATTORNEY COUNCIL

Thank you to our Attorney Council for donating their time and expertise to our participants. We appreciate your valuable input as we create bridges between the legal system and our food and farm businesses. The Legal Food Hub's services would not be possible without our pro bono network. If you are an attorney interested in joining our pro bono network, please visit legalfoodhub.org/new-attorney or email legalfoodhub@clf.org.



ALISON SCLATER

Morgan Lewis



AMY MANZELLI

BCM Environmental &
Land Law, PLLC



BRIAN J. REILLY

Partridge Snow &
Hahn LLP



JEFF BERNSTEIN

BCK Law, P.C.



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www.legalfoodhub.org
844.LAW.GROW
legalfoodhub@clf.org